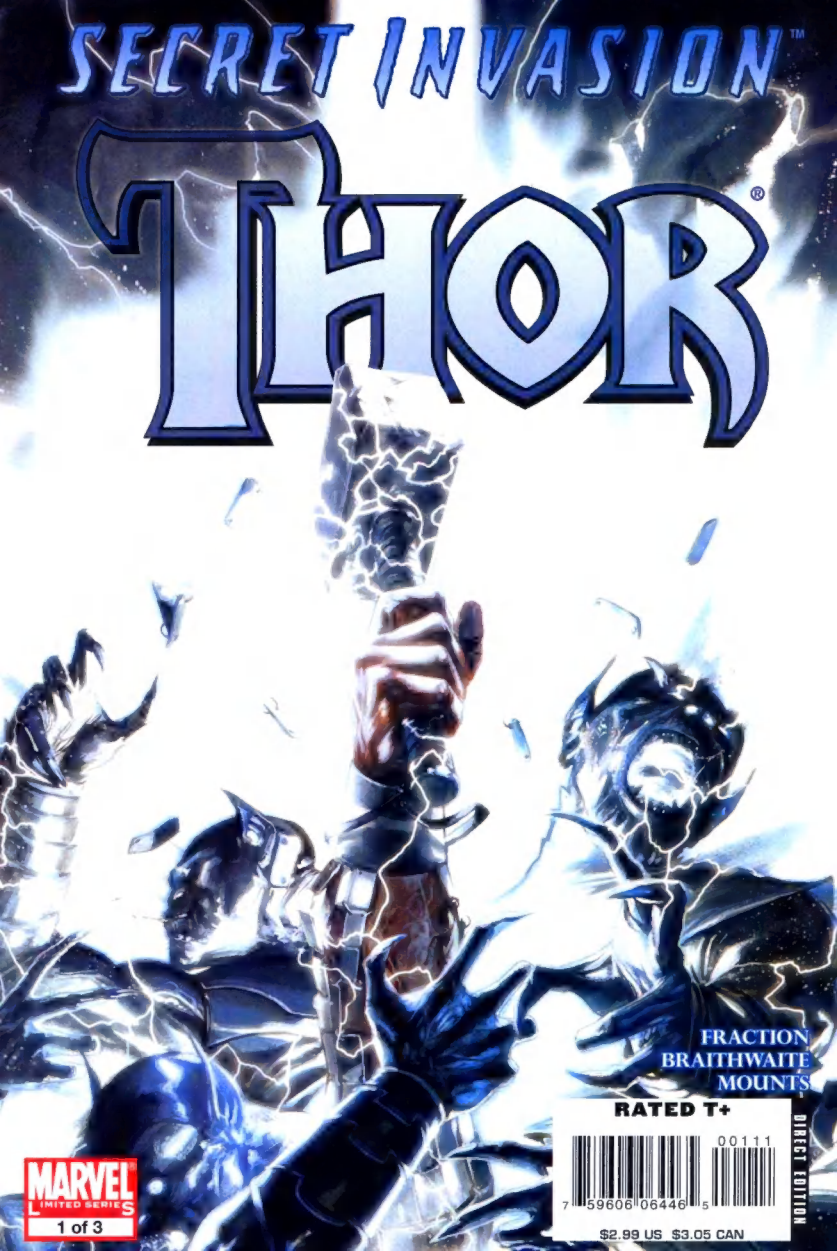
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MARVEL
LIMITED SERIES
1 of 3

HIS AGONY IS UNIMAGINABLE.
BEFORE IT, ALL HE KNEW WAS DARKNESS, AND TIME-WITHOUT-TIME. HE WAS IN LIMBO. HE WAS NOWHERE.
AND NOW...
THERE IS NOTHING BUT PAIN...
AND VELOCITY. UNCONTROLLABLE, CEASELESS VELOCITY.
IS THIS HELL?
IT MUST BE.
HELL IS A COLUMN OF FIRE...
DRILLING STRAIGHT INTO THE HEART OF THE WORLD.

NOW, I KNOW I'M NOT YOUR REGULAR OB/GYN, MARIE. SO I HOPE THIS ISN'T GROUND YOU GUYS HAVE ALREADY COVERED, BUT...
I'M PRETTY SURE YOU'RE PREGNANT.
YOU REALLY ARE A DOCTOR, AREN'T YOU?
I ACTUALLY HAVE MY DOCTORATE IN RENAISSANCE POETRY. THAT STILL MEANS I'M A DOCTOR, RIGHT?
THIS'LL BE A LITTLE COLD.
THERE WE GO. SOUNDING GREAT.
WOWOW WOWOW WOWOW WOWOW
WHEW! I JUST--I JUST STARTED TO GET NERVOUS AND THEN I THOUGHT HE WASN'T KICKING AND THEN--
IT'S OKAY.
I JUST--OF COURSE, WEEK THIRTY-SEVEN, MY REAL DOCTOR'S THREE TOWNS OVER--I'M JUST SO WORRIED IT'LL ALL GO TO POT RIGHT HERE AT THE FINISH LINE.
MARIE. YOU'RE DOING FINE. THE BABY SOUNDS FINE.
YOU'RE A SCOONCH DILATED AND EVERYTHING'S SOUNDING EXACTLY LIKE IT SHOULD SOUND. IF YOUR WATER BREAKS OR CONTRACTIONS START, WE'LL DEAL WITH IT.
THE BABY'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S BABY TIME. THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO IS JUST STAY CALM AND STAY HERE IN BROXTON UNTIL BABY SAYS OTHERWISE.

I KNOW. I KNOW, IT'S JUST--
FIRST BABY.
IT'S MY FIRST BABY.
IT'S OKAY. JUST REMEMBER, BABY'S NICE AND CALM AS LONG AS MOMMA STAYS NICE AND...
...CALM.
THE NOISE IS BIGGER THAN ANYTHING ANYONE IN BROXTON HAD EVER HEARD BEFORE.
LOUDER THAN THUNDER, HEAVIER THAN ALL OF HEAVEN ITSELF.
IT BLOWS WINDOWS IN, IT KNOCKS FAMILY PHOTOS OFF OF WALLS, AND IT TERRIFIES EVERY DOG, CAT, AND HORSE FOR THIRTY MILES.
WHAT WAS THAT?
BLAKE ISN'T REALLY FROM AROUND HERE.
AND THUS, IN HIS HEART OF HEARTS, BLAKE KNOWS THE ANSWER TO HER QUESTION BEFORE SHE EVEN FINISHES ASKING...

ASGARD IS BURNING.

MARIE, I NEED YOU TO STAY HERE, OKAY?

I HAVE TO GO SEE WHAT THAT WAS.

WHAT DO YOU *THINK* IT WAS?

HE KNOWS.

I DUNNO. GRAIN SILO EXPLODED, MAYBE.

MAYBE A PLANE CRASH. WHATEVER IT WAS, THEY'LL NEED A DOCTOR.

BLAKE'S LYING. SOMETHING'S WRONG IN ASGARD--HE NEEDS TO GET TO--

HEY, SPEAKING OF, DOC?

EITHER I JUST WET MY PANTS OR MY WATER BROKE.

HER WATER BROKE.

CONGRATULATIONS, MARIE. YOU'RE OFFICIALLY IN ***LABOR***.

NOW, LABOR TENDS TO BE LONG, ARDUOUS, AND A LITTLE ***SLOW***--BUT I PROMISE YOU, TODAY, MAYBE TONIGHT...WE'RE GONNA HAVE THIS BABY.

AND WE'LL ***START*** JUST AS SOON AS I GET BACK.

INDEED, THE BABY WAS ON ITS WAY. BLAKE CALLED FOR A NURSE PRACTITIONER AND STAYED WITH MARIE UNTIL SHE ARRIVED.
THEN HE TOOK HIS LEAVE.
AS SOON AS HE WAS OUT OF SIGHT HE RAN.
AND WHEN HE STOPPED RUNNING, HE SUMMONED...
THE MIGHTY THOR.
FIRST SON OF ASGARD. ITS LORD AND RULER. ITS HEART AND SOUL.
ITS PROTECTOR.

THERE WAS FIRE.
AND SO THE GOD OF THUNDER BROUGHT RAIN.
THOR!
BALDER.
WHAT HAPPENED?
I DO NOT KNOW. THINGS WERE FINE AND THEN--
THERE WAS A ROAR, AND THERE WAS HEAT. AND THEN--
AND THEN THE SCREAMING STARTED.
WE WERE STRUCK, MY LORD. SOMETHING CAME FROM THE SKY SO FAST, EVEN HEIMDALL WAS CAUGHT UNAWARE.
SHOW ME.
AYE.

WHO WOULD DARE ATTACK US LIKE THIS, THOR?
WHAT FOE WOULD BE SO BRAZEN, SO POWERFUL AS TO--
NOT FOE, BALDER.
...NOT FOE.
BETA RAY BILL!
THOR, MY BROTHER.
AM I DEAD? IS THIS--
ASGARD.
YOU LANDED IN ASGARD.

THOR.
I'M SORRY-- I'M SO--
THEY'RE COMING. DO YOU HEAR ME? THEY ARE COMING.
WHO?
WHO DID THIS TO YOU--TO ASGARD?
REMEMBER THIS PAIN.
REMEMBER WHO INFLICTED THIS UPON YOU.
AND REMEMBER THIS. OUR MESSAGE...
"LEAVE EARTH OR BE DESTROYED."
SKRULLS. THEY ARE COMING, BROTHERS. AN ENTIRE ARMADA, ON ITS WAY TO EARTH.
THEY DON'T WANT TO DESTROY MANKIND-- THEY WANT TO SAVE IT. YOU ASGARDIANS... THAT'S ANOTHER STORY.

GET HIM UP, BALDER.
AYE. HE'S HEAVY.
THOR--
REST, BILL. DON'T SPEAK.
NO, THOR-- BROTHER. THERE IS ONE MORE THING.
"STORMBREAKER...
"MY HAMMER...A WEAPON EVERY BIT THE EQUAL OF YOUR MJOLNIR..."
THEY STILL HAVE IT.
THOSE MONSTERS STILL HAVE MY HAMMER.
WELL, MY LORD?
WHAT'S THE PLAN?

APPARENTLY, BRAVE BALDER, YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY ONE WONDERING THAT.
ASGARDIANS. A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME.
DAYS COMING. WE HAVE SEEN WORSE.
WHAT THEY DID TO BILL WAS A MESSAGE TO ALL OF US--A THREAT.
THIS MENACE IS VERY REAL. IT IS VERY POWERFUL. IT IS TRAVELING A VERY LONG WAY TO DESTROY US ALL.
WE WILL RAISE OUR DEFENSES.
WE WILL FIGHT THEM TO THE LAST.
AND WE WILL DEFEND THOSE THAT CANNOT DEFEND THEMSELVES.
'TWAS I WHO CHOSE TO BRING ASGARD HERE, SO CLOSE TO MORTAL MAN.
AND NOW THAT PROXIMITY--THAT VERY LINK BETWEEN WE, THE DIVINE, AND THOSE THAT GRANT THAT DIVINITY TO US...
COULD I HAVE INADVERTENTLY DOOMED THEM?
TODAY WE FIGHT, BROTHERS AND SISTERS.
TODAY WE STAND UP AND NEVER, EVER RELENT.
BROTHERS AND SISTERS--
PREP YOURSELVES:
TODAY WE GO TO WAR.

BROXTON COMES FIRST. MANKIND MUST BE PROTECTED ABOVE ALL.
A RUSE WILL BE REQUIRED.
STORMS.
BRING [redacted] STORMS.
THERE IS RUMBLING... SO BIG AND SO LOUD IT SEEMS TO COME FROM WITHIN THE EARTH ITSELF...
GET THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE ON THE LINE AND MAKE SURE THEY'RE SEEING IT, TOO--
[redacted] THAT METEOR AND NOW THESE CLOUDS--
WE GOTTA GET ON THE AIR [redacted] THIS. NOW.
FOLKS, WE HAVE A BIG, BAD STORM THAT'S BEARING RIGHT DOWN ON US.
THERE ARE TORNADIC CELLS SWEEPING IN TO THE BROXTON AREA FROM THE WEST, THE SOUTH AND--SOMEHOW, THE EAST.
PEOPLE IN BROXTON, YOU'LL NEED TO TAKE SHELTER IMMEDIATELY...

BROXTON KNOWS THE DRILL.
LIFE IN TORNADO ALLEY MEANS, PRETTY MUCH FROM APRIL TO SEPTEMBER, YOU'RE ALWAYS A LITTLE READY TO HEAD TO THE [redacted].
THE WARNINGS DON'T LAST LONG.
STORMS, AFTER ALL, MOVE.
SO BROXTON MOVES TO SAFETY, BATTENS DOWN THE HATCHES, AND HOLDS ON.
THINGS TEND TO WORK OUT OKAY.
NOBODY THINKS MUCH OF IT, ESPECIALLY IN THE LATE SUMMER.
STORMS COME THROUGH, FOLKS STAY SAFE, AND EVERYBODY HELPS EVERYBODY ELSE CLEAN UP LATER.
...WHERE'S DOC BLAKE?
HE'LL BE HERE, SWEETHEART. LET'S GET YOU INSIDE NOW [redacted] THE CONTRACTIONS START AGAIN...

IN ASGARD, A SIMILAR SPIRIT OF PARTNERSHIP AND COOPERATION SWEEPS THROUGH ALL OF ITS CITIZENS.
WELL ALMOST ALL...
SHARPENING YOUR TALONS FOR WAR, EH, TRICKSTER?
AYE, YOU GIANT OX. SO I AM.
AND I WAS THINKING.
SKRULLS ARE SHAPESHIFTERS YES? ALIENS.
HOW DO I TELL THEM FROM US? HOW DO WE KNOW WE ARE WHO WE SAY WE ARE?
SAYS THE WOMAN THAT WAS ONCE A MAN.
DON'T START TRICKSTER. NOT TODAY.
THERE IS MUCH WORK TO BE DONE AND WE DON'T NEED YOUR MISCHIEF SLOWING THINGS DOWN.
BUT LOKI'S TRICKSTER SEED HAD BEEN PLANTED.
AND IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THE FIRST TO WONDER...
HOW DO WE KNOW BETA RAY BILL IS WHO HE SAYS HE IS?

IT SPREADS.
ONE [redacted] AT A TIME, ONE WHISPER AT [redacted] TIME.
GOOD SOULS SWEPT UP IN THE FEAR AND INTENSITY OF THE MOMENT.
LOKI WATCHES.
LOKI SMILES.
LOKI NEVER [redacted] TO DO SO LITTLE TO YIELD SO MUCH DOUBT, [redacted] FEAR. [redacted]
BALDER!
THE PEOPLE OF ASGARD WERE CONVINCED THERE WAS A VILLAIN AMONGST THEM.
BALDER!
BRING THE ALIEN TO US! NOW!
THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE, BROTHERS AND SISTERS.
YOU SHOULD GET BACK TO IT.

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MINDS?
THANK YOU, THOR.
AYE.
THE REST OF YOU--GET ON YOUR DAMNED FEET.
IF THOU WOULD HAVE BUSINESS WITH [redacted] BILL, THEN COME.
LET US TALK BUSINESS.
BILL!
MY COUNTRYMEN BELIEVE YOU TO BE A SKRULL, AND THEY APPEAR TO WISH FOR YOUR HEAD UPON [redacted] PIKE.
I--WHA--?
WHY DON'T [redacted] SHOW THEM WHO YOU REALLY ARE?
REVEAL YOURSELF TO THEM AS I KNOW YOU.

I LIVE AGAIN!

SEE?
I KNOW MY BROTHER WHEN I SEE HIM.
BUT... MY LORD... IF YOU ARE IN THERE...
WITHOUT YOU, WHO SHALL LEAD US?
YOU, BALDER. THOR WANTS YOU TO DO IT, WITH BILL AS YOUR SECOND. I HAVE TO GET TO BROKTON AND HELP.
WE SHALL NOT WANT FOR MUSCLE NOR FOR FIREPOWER, BRAVE BALDER.
TRUST ME WHEN I PROMISE YOU THAT.
BILL RETURNED BLAKE TO BROKTON.
HE WOULD HOLD THE LINE WITH BALDER IN ASGARD UNTIL THE CHILD WAS DELIVERED.
THEY BOTH KNOW WHAT IS AT STAKE.
THEY ARE BROTHERS BORN OF WARFARE AND STRIFE; IT IS A BOND FEW UNDERSTAND.

IT IS A BOND ETERNALLY UNBREAKABLE.
AND IT WILL PROVE TO BE INVALUABLE...
...BECAUSE ALL HELL IS COMING TO BROXTON.
OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD
THAT'S IT-- THAT'S IT--
OKAY-- =PSSHHHHH=
OKAY OKAY. OKAY.
IT'S PASSING NOW. OKAY.
THEY'RE GETTING STRONGER.
YEP. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS.
OKAY. CAN WE WALK AGAIN?
GREAT IDEA. NICE AND EASY.
BREATHE IN BIG AND LET'S PERAMBULATE A BIT.
PERAMMAWHAT?
"PERAMBULATE" MEANS WALK, BUT I CAN'T SAY "WALK" AROUND MY DOGS, OR EVEN SPELL W-A-L-K, BECAUSE THEY KNOW WHAT IT MEANS AND GO NUTS.
I'M SURE THEY'LL FIGURE IT OUT, BUT FOR NOW, IT'S MY WORD FOR "WALK."
YOU'RE TRYING TO DISTRACT ME SOME, AREN'T YOU?
GET MY MIND OFF THE FACT DOC BLAKE'S NOT HERE YET.

To Be Continued...

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